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UNCLAS DUSHANBE 001746

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: JAPANESE CHARGE: "TOKYO LOOKING FOR NEW IDEAS
FOR CENTRAL ASIA"

1. (SBU) New Japanese Charge d'affaires Hiroshi Takahashi called on the Ambassador on October 26. Unlike his, Takahashi is energetic and brimming with ideas based on his extensive experience in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

2. (U) Takahashi noted his government established the "Japan Plus Central Asia Forum" in 2004, but has done relatively little to energize it. Tokyo is now ready to move again and has asked for new ideas.

3. (SBU) Takahashi said Japan supports the U.S. and EU positions on the Andijon events in Uzbekistan but so far seems to be under Tashkent's radar. As soon as Tashkent figures out Tokyo's position, Takahashi predicts it will be harder for Japan to do any business in Uzbekistan. Takahashi recommends that Japan concentrate on relations and development projects with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and, especially Tajikistan.

4. (SBU) Takahashi judges Tajikistan is pivotal in Central Asia because of Afghanistan. He sees two possible initiatives that would help build Tajik-Afghan ties. He will suggest that Tokyo encourage the creation of a "binational free-trade dry port" at the site of the new Tajik-Afghan bridge at Nizhniy Pyanzh. He pointed out that Afghans have traditionally been great traders, and a free-port trade zone between Tajikistan and Afghanistan could help stimulate economic development in the region.

5. (SBU) Takahashi said he would like to see Tajik migrant laborers turn from Russia to Afghanistan, especially as large infrastructure construction projects take off in Afghanistan. He noted they would be closer to home, share a common language, and be treated better than in Russia. He added he would like to see Japan, the United States, and the European Union do much more to encourage Tajik companies to participate in Afghan reconstruction. He said he knew the United States had once pushed this for Uzbekistan but, he alleged, President Karimov had undercut this initiative because he did not want Uzbek companies prospering abroad where he feared they might be beyond his control.

6. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that India, too, may be looking for greater involvement in Central Asia, and encouraged Tokyo and New Delhi to consider consulting how to promote economic and democratic development in the region. He noted that as "eastern democracies," both Japan and India would be especially well-placed to support Western efforts to promote democratic development. Their participation would help to counter those among the old guard in Tajikistan who protest that democracy is a Western export inappropriate for Asian countries.

HOAGLAND

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